

ing a text's "proper" place.

This strange mobility can be no better exemplified than by a Ballard piece from the mid-1960s. In the transition from his quiet internal dislocation of the disaster genre to the "condensed novels" of *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Ballard produced a series of "adverts" for his new mode of writing, the name of the product being "J. G. Ballard." One of these "adverts" used as a slogan the apparently nonsense question: "Does the Angle Between Two Walls Have a Happy Ending?" But this question, one which recurs throughout *The Atrocity Exhibition*, seems to me to indicate Ballard's occupation of the "impossible" angle between frames, how his work hovers at the edge of categorizations at once inside them and outside them, producing intolerable anxiety (there can be no "happy ending"). Wouldn't this explain his simultaneous centrality and marginality to science fiction, the awkwardness with which the academy cannot resolve whether to treat his work as "serious" or "popular"? For the angle, the hinge, at once separates and connects two elements together, is the point of both articulation and disarticulation. The leverage Ballard gives in the classroom is to reflect back from the impossible perspective of the angle the machinery in which we all operate, by troubling it.

Such a strange object as the "Angle Between" advert is itself a "hinge" text, at once an anomaly and an object which invites abundant ways of thinking about it. As an avowedly commercial piece (Ballard insisted on paying the full advertising rate to the journals in which these adverts appeared: a pity *Vogue* rates were beyond him), it invites an equation between advertising and the commercial lines along which popular genres are produced. Being paid by the word is traditionally felt to sully the integrity of "serious" art. And yet as collages which occupy but subvert advertising semiotics, the adverts take their place in avant-garde practices which aim to disturb the separation of high art from commodity culture. If not as politicized as Heartfield's anti-Nazi posters, they match, tactic for tactic, Andy Warhol's outrageous attack on the institution of Art: anonymous, "factory"-produced materials which transform the authenticating signature into brand-name. Add these to the typographic collages Ballard produced whilst assistant editor of *Chemistry and Industry*, and the proposed "billboard novel" and these Ballard texts suddenly work alongside the radical art practices of artists like Daniel Buren and Jenny Holzer. Serious or popular? Commercial or avant-garde? And what *kind* of

text? Is the "copy" theory or fiction? "Fiction is a branch or neurology: the scenarios of nerve and blood vessel are the written mythologies of memory and desire. Sex: Inner Space: J. G. Ballard," reads the text. Do we place this inside the "fictional" discourse of *The Atrocity Exhibition* or outside as a theoretical statement of its aim? But this has been the perennial problem of reading such an unprecedented text. Colin Greenland has described it as "a minimal overlay of narrative gestures on a mass of theory," causing the exact same category mistakes felt by my students. And this is to say nothing as yet about how the advert's combination of iconic and verbal signs records how persistently *The Atrocity Exhibition*, impossibly, *writes painting*. That is, many of its paragraph titles are borrowed from paintings by Dali, Ernst, Magritte, Wesselmann and others, the action taking place, as it were, within the painterly frame – compacted, condensed, indeed Cubist as they are. When James Blish described the emerging "chapters" of *The Atrocity Exhibition* as "pieces of a mosaic ... going somewhere, by the most unusual method of trying to surround it, or work into it from the edges of a frame" he could not have seen how perfect a description that would become. *The Atrocity Exhibition* sustains its position at the edge of an overdetermined set of frames hovering between theory and fiction, visual and verbal, serious and popular, avant-garde and commercial, high and low, generic and experimental – in the angle *between*.

This might be taken as privileging an atypical Ballard text, but if I have been concerned to show the problems with "housing" Ballard within literary categories, it is also necessary to think how the peculiarity of the space "between" and the oscillation between the permeability and impermeability of borders constitutes Ballard's most persistent thematic throughout his work. Think how often his fictions takes place in suspensive zones, in interstices where normal logics and causalities are held in abeyance: *Concrete Island*, a patch of waste-ground between motorways; *The Unlimited Dream Company*, a Shepperton strictly bounding Blake's magical transformation (whose borders expand and contract around him but forbid his exit); *Empire of the Sun*, the anomalous pocket of the International Settlement in Shanghai, its anachronistic colonial codes suspended in the peculiar vacuum between the end of the war and the beginning of peace. Think how often Jamie finds himself on the wrong side of the border: missing the round-up of European citizens, then finding it

impossible to surrender to the Japanese or be accepted by English prisoners; spending much of internment repairing the prison fences to keep people *out* not in, but then being sent by Basie "beyond the edge" of the camp. A story like "The Dead Time," set in the devastated margins of Shanghai, weaves between autobiography and fiction, taking place in the moment of transition between peaceful war and warring peace where the dead give life and life is deathly. And the global disaster novels take place, in effect, in the space between two catastrophes: long after variably specified global disasters, the dwindling populations that occupy this terminal zone await the second catastrophe of their own deaths, each profoundly disturbed by this intermissive state. It seems to me that the disturbance Ballard causes to categorization is redoubled by his fictions which elaborate on the disadjustment of occupying suspensive zones, the angles between.

All of which is to say that in working on Ballard's texts I do not wish to *resolve* the discomfort they produce in me, my students or my colleagues. To put Ballard into the classroom by championing his literary worth is not my intent; suitably, his work can never sit easily *in* the classroom, but hovers at its edge, endlessly productive in causing difficulty, unease and embarrassment.

Ballard's old friend Angela Carter was in some ways treated disgracefully by the universities. A difficult, awkward and stunning writer who refused orthodoxies and consistently embarrassed the academy with surprising texts has, since her death, had her rough edges smoothed over and been inserted into the canon. Her last book, *Wise Children*, thematized through the bawdy, vaudeville and outré bastard twins who narrate the novel, her tangential place with regard to contemporary literature. The North London intellectuals (and I am one of them) were bounded to the South by Carter, to the West by Ballard and to the East by the remarkable Iain Sinclair. I sincerely hope that "Ballard at 65" does not mark his entry into Literature: that would be too easy, not nearly discomfiting enough. May he remain a troubling presence on the margins, reminding us of the fragility of our literary judgments.

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America; I remembered how childhood itself had become stigmatized; from my Elsinore of Holland Park, London, I was taken to the encampment on Bodmin Moor where I was to spend the next 15 years, an eleven-year-old who, like so many others to follow, had provided governments with the excuse they needed to consolidate their authoritarianism.

"Yeah, I'm old," I said. I was 26. "I was there at the beginning, when quantum computers first went on line." When programs became streams of nanomachines, the nanomachines streams of quasi-particles and photons. "My family was one of the first to have a stepfather." A fat man, he'd been, a lank-haired, thin-lipped censor in a long black coat that resembled a soutane. *He's here to help*, my real father had said, after we had returned from Laos. *He's going to watch over you*. From protecting children from images to demonizing and persecuting them was – giving the nightly transmissions, the footage of global delinquency, the black and brown adolescent hordes committing atrocities on Europe's doorstep – perhaps but one short hop, a cosmogenic leap paralleling the leap to consciousness and flesh in the self-organizing universe of the fibresphere; perhaps protection and persecution had always amounted to the same thing: control. "They used us as an excuse to censor the world." I bit on my tongue, a part of me too eager to reveal how, one night, when my stepfather had surprised me as I gained veristic access to an intelligence – an enemy of my country, the ineffable Dahlia Chan – and was about to download her from The Wound, I picked up a screwdriver, skewered him through his throat, his chest, again, and again, and again...

I crawled over to Dahlia's coffin; her monitor had winked alive.

"Dahlia? Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you, Zane." Was that what I was calling myself this morning? So many names. Zane Weary. Max Moroder. Jack Pimpernel. So many towns... Dahlia's face compounded; looked at me from out of the white, featureless plain of limbo, her Eurasian eyes – like black pearls mounted in a gold-paisley surround branding the LCD with their scorching crescents. Had a version of her ever fought with the children of Laos, in the deadly, degraded countryside of once popped hills? Or had her dark skin prejudiced companionship, as it had similarly incurred the ostracism of the North? She would never say. "Do we have a job?" I looked across at pimp *numero uno*.

"Okay, you can have a job. Don't know yet if you're one of the boys, but you no infidel, that's for sure. But we can't afford no big money. Board and lodging, a few extras. Tell me, can she sing?"

"Like a phoenix." I took from my pocket some of my Dahliana: movie stills, autographed concert tickets, yellowing articles ripped from Laotian and Thai magazines, information which constituted the superprogram of her simulacrum; information infected with intelligent light – the souvenirs rippled with sentience; stilled – which, slow as we'd been this morning to thwart the dawn, had reabsorbed some of her fame. "See: she's a superstar." Some of the monitors on the other coffins lit up with tanned, Californian faces, for-

gotten extras, doubtless, said the snob in me, body-doubles and 15-minute starlets (soldiers being always indoctrinated with ghosts their own age; young ghosts, like young fighters, so infinitely malleable). "Different style, of course, to what you might be used to. But –"

"She Chinese," said a boy from the door, "why you no got *white* ghost." Pimp uno silenced him with a frown. Maybe he knew too well that white, black, brown or yellow, a ghost – like those they haunted – enjoyed, at best, a para-legal status; was, at worst, an outlaw.

"We could do with a little variety. How long can you stay?"

"Two weeks, three maybe –"

"And after that?"

I looked up, bemused. "Why," I said, "Cythera, of course. We're trying to find Earth3." And this time I wasn't dissembling. The boy grinned; there was laughter from the doorway.

"Yes," he said, "maybe you *are* like us after all." Even though linear history was over I still clung to the mythic possibility of its dialectic; for wasn't Cythera supposed to be a synthesis of Earths 1 and 2, a place where the join between the real and the artificial became seamless?

"Cythera?" said Dahlia. "I'm not sure any more if it exists. All I know is I want to go home." I kissed Dahlia's enpixed lips, my cheek brushing against the mangled skeleton of a spider that hung from a dilapidated web. As I withdrew, I saw that she was crying. "I don't mean I want to go back to Earth2," she continued, addressing the room. "All I remember of that is the persecution. The things they did to us over there." Her voice crackled with static. "Not that life's any different on Earth Prime." She was right, of course; existence, as I have learnt, is just one huge, inescapable prison; mirrors within mirrors within mirrors; children were being demonized in the image-world for consorting with "ghosts" whom – reciprocating our own world's prejudices – were considered to be as dangerous and as unreal as we considered the ghosts of the fibresphere; "ghosts," that is, such as myself; no escape; no matter how ingenious, an inmate would always find themselves, just at the moment of breaking through a wall, tunnelling beneath a fence, or bluffing a passage through the main gates, confronted by another prison, more cells, racks, corridors, halls and torments; and even after breaking through what might have seemed like an ultimate barrier, the last wall or fence that hemmed them from the outside world, they would soon discover that that mountain vista, that great city or that valley beneath a clear blue sky, was but another room, another prison within a prison within a prison, that that city, mountain range and valley were fakes, theatrical props, and that they would always be denied freedom unless they might step through a crack in time and space, step beyond those universes within universes entirely; step into Cythera. "I just want to go home – even if it's to a home I've never had."

I stared at the monitor. It was as if I had again first